

California Student Aid Commission
Leave of Absence and Renewal Eligibility Questions & Answers
September 2003

The following questions and answers have been prepared by the Commission as indicated in Policy Bulletin 2003-01 and Operations Memo 2003-07.

What are the benefits to this new policy?

The new policy allows students to more effectively manage their Cal Grant eligibility. This is particularly important for students who will take longer than four years to complete their program. As long as students attend the minimum number of required terms per year, their grants will be eligible for renewal. Eligibility can be extended over more academic years without depleting the leave of absence allowance. Students attending semester schools are required to attend one semester per academic year. Those at quarter schools are required to attend two quarters per academic year.

The new policy will reduce the number of transactions that the schools are required to report.

The Policy Bulletin states that the last term of the award year is always excluded from the renewal eligibility calculation. Does this mean the summer term?

The “last term of the award year” refers to the last term of the academic year prior to the start of the next academic year, regardless of whether it is discretionary or mandatory. This term is usually referred to as “Summer” on the CSAC roster. For a semester school, it would be the term following the second semester. For a quarter school, it would be the fourth quarter. For a trimester school, it would be the third trimester.

The Policy Bulletin mentions that implementation of this policy eliminates the need to post a “Leave from Payment.” Won’t that adversely affect community college students who wish to postpone use of their grant to conserve eligibility?

Under the new policy, students are only required to use Leave of Absence to satisfy the minimum number of terms required per year.

For example, a student attending a semester-based community college could be paid for fall term of the first year, and then be renewed based on the new policy (having met the one term per year requirement). The student could then be paid for fall of the next year and once again be renewed for the next year. The following year, the student could be paid for both terms (which uses no leave time). By the end of the third year, the student would have used 200 percent of Cal Grant eligibility. This preserves 200 percent payment eligibility and the full academic year of leave eligibility for transfer to a four-year school.

Will this policy be applied retroactively?

Yes, when new leave of absence requests are entered, prior terms will be evaluated to determine if the student has remaining leave eligibility. Edits have been added to the payment screens to review all prior transactions to determine if a student has remaining eligibility for the leave. Transactions entered by CSAC will appear on the school’s Accept/ Reject report and will indicate whether the student was eligible for the leave.

Our school does not have semesters or quarters. How does this apply to our students?

Regardless of the actual attendance pattern of a student, Cal Grants are paid out on a quarter basis (four payments per calendar year) or semester basis (three payments per calendar year). CSAC categorizes non-traditional schools as either a quarter or semester school, as reflected on the school roster. Schools should refer to their roster to determine the minimum number of terms required for renewal.

If a student's Cal Grant can get renewed for the next year before a school has reported the last term's payment, won't this make it harder for schools to pay students in the prior year?

No. The Commission will continue the practice of allowing Cal Grant payment through September 30 following the award year. Even though the student's Cal Grant has already been renewed, schools will still be able to report or correct payments from the prior year.

How many automatic leaves are available to each student?

There is no set limit on how many automatic leaves can be applied to a student's record. In practical application, however, Cal Grant participants will not remain in the program indefinitely without either using up their total program eligibility or exceeding the total leave of absence limit. Students must continue to maintain satisfactory academic progress to remain active in the Cal Grant program.

If a student files 2 Leaves of Absences during one academic year at a semester-based school, are they both reflected on the Student History screen?

Both leave transactions will be shown on the Student History screen and are maintained in the database. However, when determining eligibility for future leaves of absence, only one term of leave of absence will be counted.

The Operations Memo, GOM 2003-07, states that, "A 'leave of absence' will not be required for those brief periods not covered by payments transactions nor is there a need to report a 'leave of payment'." What do you mean by 'brief periods'?

As long as a student attends the minimum number of required terms per academic year, then it is not necessary to post a leave of absence for any term for which the student does not wish to receive payment.